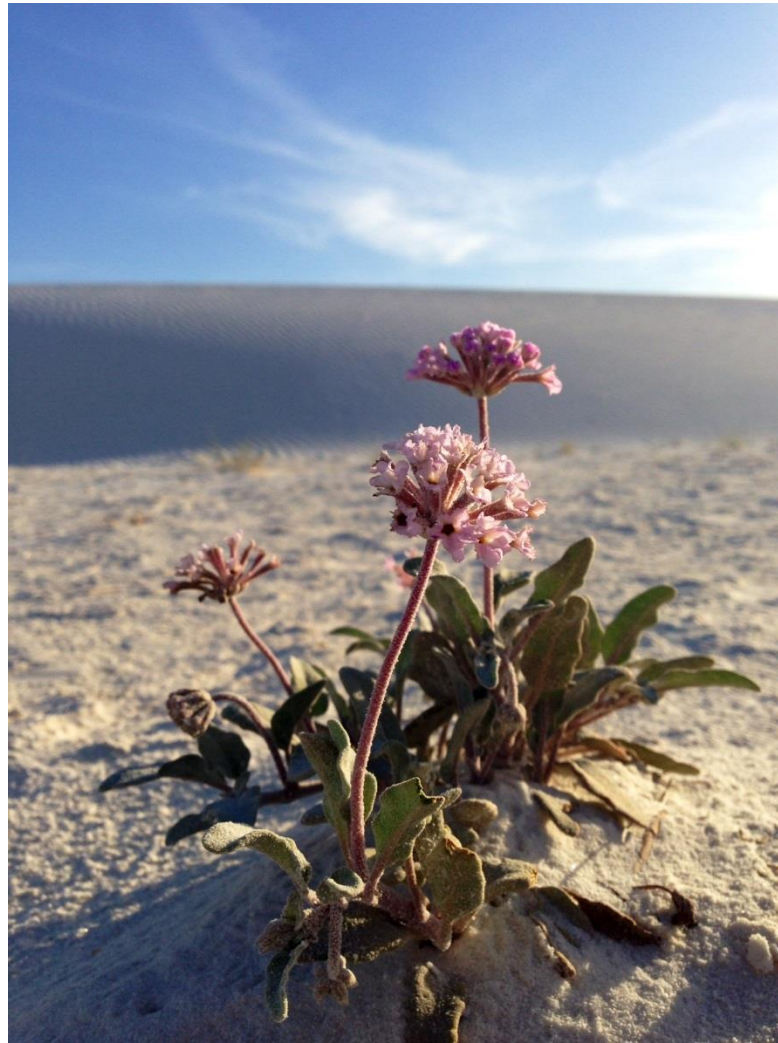



Supporting Learner Persistence and Motivation




Quiz

- Research finds that the first three weeks of a student's participation in a program is important because:
 - if they don't develop a sense of connection and belonging within that time, they are more likely to leave
 - if they don't feel challenged in the first 3 weeks, they are more likely to leave
 - if they haven't reached a short-term goal within that time, they are more likely to leave



➤ The 1990s study of adult learner persistence by the National Center for the Study of Language and Literacy (NCSALL) identified 4 key factors that support student persistence. Which of these is NOT one of the factors:

- having a goal
- seeing progress on your goals
- having the GED as a goal




➤ When researchers found that adults often leave programs and then come back when they can (rather than dropping out for good), they named this:

- dropping in
- stopping out
- persistence



➤ Persistence is different from retention in that:

- Persistence is from the perspective of the student (who persists), while retention is from the perspective of the program (which retains students)
- Persistence is lifelong, while retention is just for a semester
- There are ways to measure retention, but not persistence



Since many adults move in and out of programs several times before they finish their studies, NCSALL researchers recommend that programs:

- develop stop-out plans with students
- set strict attendance policies
- set a limit on how many times students can come back to a program



➤ Which of these do you think characterize the “persistors” in the NCSALL and other persistence research studies?

➤ Gender

➤ Ethnicity

➤ Immigrant Status

➤ Having a goal

➤ Age of children

➤ Negative past school experience

➤ Employment status

➤ Parent’s education

➤ Working hours

➤ Single parent status

➤ Involvement in previous education or training



Characteristics of persistors

- Immigrant status, age over 30, and parent of teen or adult children.
- Involvement in previous efforts at basic skills education, self study, or vocational skill training
- Having a specific goal



Which factors mattered most (in either a positive or negative way)?

- **The teacher**
- **Quality and relevance of instruction**
- **Having a goal**
- **Relationships**
- **Program supports**
- **Supportive peers**
- **Sense of self**
- **Life demands (transportation, child care needs, home life, work schedules, etc.)**



Forces that affect participation negatively

- Life demands (49%)
- Unsupportive relationships (17%)
- Negative sense of self (11%)



Forces that affect participation positively

- Relationships (63%)
- Relevant instruction (63%)
- Having a goal (57%)
- Teachers and students (51%)
- Positive sense of self (44%)



Four Supports to Persistence

Comings, Parella, and Soricone (1999)

- **Management of positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence**
- **The establishment of a goal by a student**
- **Self-efficacy (feeling you can reach a goal)**
- **Progress towards reaching a goal**



The Critical First Three Weeks

Allen Quigley (1998)

- At least one third of new students are at risk of dropping out in the first three weeks
- Learners tend to come to ABE with sufficient motivation, but encounter things that “demotivate” them
- Early verbal connection between teacher and student is critical to sustaining motivation



Turbulence and Focus

Tom Sticht, et al. (1998)

- **Open-entry makes teaching and learning more difficult**
- **Multi-focus/multi-level classes make persistence more difficult**
- **Persistence increases in classes where the focus of students and class is closely aligned (e.g., job readiness, GED)**



Stop Outs, Not Drop Outs

Alisa Belzer (1998)

- **Leavers don't consider themselves "drop-outs"**
- **They stop attending but plan on returning**
- **Departure from a program is not viewed as a failure, but rather as a temporary hiatus**

NELRC Persistence Project

Strategy Focus	NELP Programs	Attendance Rate Δ	Completion Rate Δ
Intake and Orientation (310 students)	Clinton AE, MA Franklin County, ME Nashua AE, NH etc.	14%	18%
Instruction and Learning Options (234 students)	Intl. Inst. of Boston, MA Central Falls Lib., RI RIFLI, RI etc.	16%	22%
Counseling and Peer Supports (147 students)	Quinsigamond CC, MA HERC, MA Middletown AE, CT SCALE, MA	7%	25%
Re-Engagement (80 students)	CLC, MA Dover AE, NH EASTConn AE, CT	Average # of students that re-engaged = 22	Average # of independent study hours = 30

We believe these strategies work because they support adults' need for:

- A sense of community and belonging
- Agency
- Clarity of purpose
- Relevance
- A sense of competence
- Stability

[Drivers of Persistence]



A sense of belonging and community

When we feel welcomed, respected, and offered a sense of belonging, we are more apt to return to that setting or task. For that reason, cultivating a sense of belonging and community from the moment a prospective adult learner comes through the doors or calls is an important persistence strategy.



Clarity of purpose

Clarity of purpose refers to helping students gain clarity about their own purposes for learning - their goals and dreams – and about the program's expectations and approaches to providing education. That way, adults can make informed decisions and take responsibility for their learning.



A sense of competence

Adults' beliefs about their competence can have a profound effect on their persistence and achievement. Such beliefs reflect their self-efficacy. Students with more self-efficacy are more willing to persist to reach to their goals in the face of adversity. People who have high self-efficacy visualize success whereas those who doubt their efficacy typically visualize failure.

Stability

Learning is difficult in an environment that is chaotic or unstable. This is challenging, especially, for the many adult learners whose lives are marked by instability caused by poverty and trauma. According to Perry (2006), “The key to understanding the long-term impact of trauma on an adult learner is to remember that he or she is often, at baseline, in a state of low-level fear. . . . The major challenge to the educator working with highly stressed or traumatized adults is to furnish the structure, predictability, and sense of safety that can help them begin to feel safe enough to learn.”



Relevance

The degree of perceived relevance of the instructional program to the adult learners' goals, interests and life experience is a key factor in adults' motivation to persist in their studies even if they need to stop out for a while. Most adult learners juggle many competing priorities that may take precedence if the instructional program does not feel meaningful to their needs and interests.



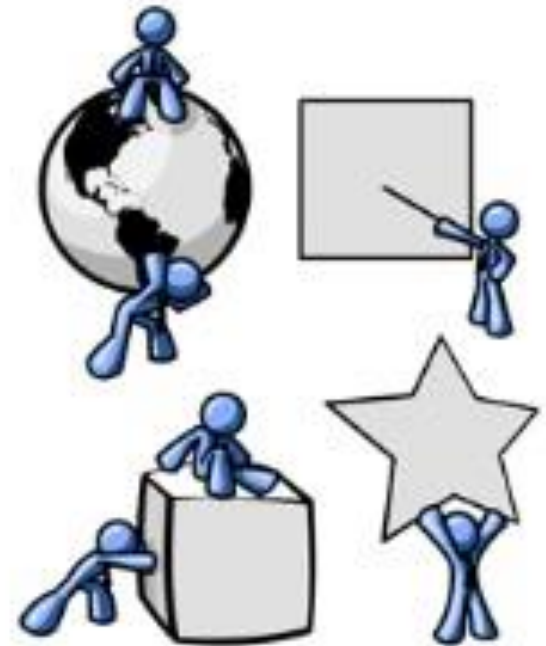
Agency

Human agency is the capacity for human beings to make things happen through their actions. As people mature, they move from dependence toward self-direction, and want to be treated as responsible individuals with the capacity to determine things for themselves.

Program Areas for Intervention

- Intake and Orientation
- Counseling and Program Activities
- Classroom Practice and Instruction

[Overall Program Structure and Environment]



Takeaway Strategies

- Group Activity
- Report back
- And some suggestions from us...



Thanks!

Priyanka Sharma

psharma@worlded.org

617-385-3788

National College Transition

Network at World Education

www.collegetransition.org

www.collegeforadults.org

